



Discipline When Problems Arise

Just as learning to walk is a process, so is learning self-control. It is normal that your child will forget the rules, test limits and make wrong choices. Here are some tips you can use when your child misbehaves.

Repeat, Restate, Remind

When a problem comes up, stop the action and restate the rule. "Hands are not for hitting. Hitting hurts." "The scissors stay in the scissors can." Use a calm, matter of fact tone.

Focus on Alternatives

Help children find a better way to get what they want. "Put your hand on my arm and wait until I stop talking to ask your question." Involve your child in figuring out their conflict and finding a creative way to solve it. "I wonder how you can both get what you want?" When your child wants something that is not allowed, offer other options. "You can play quietly inside, or you can go outside, but you can't blow whistles when the baby is asleep."

Distract and Redirect

When your child does something you don't like, try to redirect him. It's often easy to distract babies and young children. If your toddler goes to touch something he shouldn't, calmly and gently move him to a new area. Sometimes older children act out when they are bored. You can redirect by changing to a new activity or going outside. When you can't go outside or are on a long car trip, try activities and games that need creativity and

imagination. Come prepared with coloring books, guessing and memory games or stories.

Know When to Ignore

Each time you respond to a behavior from your child that you dislike, you reinforce it, which may increase the behavior. One thing you can do is ignore it. Things you may want to ignore include whining, arguing about rules, tantrums and interrupting. Tell the child ahead of time what behavior you are going to ignore. It is best not to ignore actions that are unsafe to your child or others such as throwing things, hitting or biting. Many times the behavior will get worse at first when you ignore it. Decide ahead of time if you are willing and able to ignore it. Then be ready to stick it out. Try to always praise the behavior you do want as soon as you see it.

Match Consequences to the Action

When you connect the act with a consequence you help your child learn self-control. If your child throws a toy truck, put the truck away for the rest of the day. If he acts badly at the store, he loses the chance to go with you next time. Logical consequences also include fixing any social or physical damage done, like cleaning the wall or apologizing for hitting. Consequences should be given right away when you can.

Call Time-out

Time-outs can be used in two ways. Some parents use time-out when a child loses control of himself or when his emotions are high.

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Call Time-out, continued

This gives him time to cool off and regroup. Once your child is calm, you can talk about what happened and find ways to resolve the problem.

Time-out can also be used when your child misbehaves. This can be used for 2 1/2 to 12-year-olds. The key is being consistent. Give a warning before giving a time-out. When your child breaks a rule, send him to a pre-set boring place like a chair in a corner close to family action. Tell him he needs to sit and be quiet for a set amount of time (one minute for each year of age). Begin timing when he is quiet.

Tell your child what a time-out is before using it. Explain that when he breaks a certain rule or won't stop doing certain things, he will get time-out. When a time-out is over, simply tell your child in a neutral voice, do not lecture.

Time-out can work well but if you use it often it will lose its impact. Save it for one or two behaviors that you find intolerable. The goal is not to punish but to teach what is expected behavior. If you use both types of time-outs it is best not to call them both "time-out."

Tips for Success

- It is best to respond right away whether you are giving praise or a consequence.
- Involve your children in planning and problem solving. This will help them feel a part of the family and learn a sense of responsibility. Family meetings are a good place to discuss rules and consequences.

- Try to have a special time for just you and your child on a regular basis.
- Get to know your child's friends and their parents. Your school-age and pre-teen child will begin to spend more time with friends.
- Parents are people, too. If you are stressed or having a rough time, recognize your own needs and find some time away just for yourself.
- Each child reacts to events and stress in their own way. Some children are calm, some are easy to excite. Some seem to test limits more than others do. Having a good sense of humor and keeping patient can help a lot.
- Know there is no one right way. Things that work well will change as your child grows. What works with one child may have no effect on another.
- All parents need support. Seek out other parents with whom you can share your parenting ups and downs.

To learn more, call for the Positive Discipline Booklist from Children's at the number listed below or find it on our Web site at www.seattlechildrens.org.

For More Information

- **Your health care provider**
- **Children's Resource Line:**
(206) 987-2500 or 1-866-987-2500
toll-free Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho
- **www.seattlechildrens.org**

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health care provider.

Children's

Hospital & Regional Medical Center

4800 Sand Point Way N.E.
Seattle, Washington 98105-0371
206-987-2000 (Voice)

206-987-2280 (TTY)
866-987-2000 (Toll-free/Voice)
www.seattlechildrens.org